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INFO RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 1026
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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/25/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KCRM](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: WHO KILLED FORMER TAJIK INTERIOR MINISTER SOLEHOV?

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

[¶1.](#) (SBU) Summary: Competing explanations have emerged regarding last week's death of former Tajik Minister of Internal Affairs Mahmadnazar Solehov. Initial reports indicated that Solehov, for whom an arrest warrant was issued the day before his death, killed himself to avoid arrest. The government of Tajikistan continues to publicly insist on this explanation. However, Solehov's family members claim police murdered him after entering his house. Solehov's death highlights the heavy-handed nature of President Rahmon's government in the midst of Tajikistan's growing internal troubles. End summary.

A SUICIDE . . . ?

[¶2.](#) (SBU) At about 10 p.m. on the evening of June 17 a crowd gathered outside Solehov's house in Dushanbe, located a few yards from an embassy staffer's house. A source at the scene said that Solehov had shot himself less than an hour before. According to a second source, a neighbor of Solehov's, two guests had arrived at the house shortly before the incident. This source said he later heard two gunshots from inside Solehov's house. He claimed he later saw two bodies being removed from the home, including that of the former minister. It was unclear to him who had shot whom.

[¶3.](#) (SBU) Subsequent media reports indicated that at least one guest, Rahmatullo Asadulloev, had been eating dinner with Solehov at the time of his death. Asadulloev is the former head of Tajikistan's Committee for Youth, Sports, and Tourism. He told local media that police entered Solehov's home to arrest him as they were eating. Solehov then went into another room and shot himself.

. . . OR MURDER?

[¶4.](#) (SBU) According to a local journalist who arrived at the house shortly after the shooting, Solehov's 12-year-old son was still present at the scene. When asked how his father had died, the child replied that someone had shot Solehov. Later in the evening, Solehov's wife arrived at the hospital in which her deceased husband lay, and reportedly exclaimed, "They've shot my husband!" News media published the family's account of the incident the afternoon following Solehov's death. Since then the family has been silent, arousing suspicion that officials had intimidated or bribed them.

COMPETING EXPLANATIONS

15. (SBU) The government continues to explain the death as a suicide. It points to Solehov's impending arrest as his motivation for killing himself. President Rahmon announced Solehov's removal as Interior Minister on January 29 without public explanation. In subsequent months, Solehov was charged with several offenses, including abuse of authority and embezzlement of funds. The Prosecutor General's office called him in for questioning on several occasions, but he apparently ignored these requests.

16. (S) RSO spoke with five of Solehov's former assistants on June 20. All five, including Solehov's former Personal Assistant and Chief of Staff, expressed their belief that it was "impossible" for Solehov to have killed himself. They believed Solehov simply knew too much about the inner workings of Rahmon's government, and had come to be seen as a liability to the administration. None of these contacts were at Solehov's home on the night of his death, and all had developed a strong loyalty to Solehov, possibly biasing their judgment. However, their willingness to engage Embassy staff and present a collective viewpoint opposite that of the government is noteworthy.

17. (SBU) Several second-hand sources have provided additional information to EmbOffs which, while difficult to corroborate,

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casts further doubt upon the government's suicide explanation. Some reports claimed that Solehov was still alive while being taken to the hospital. Solehov was buried just 12 hours after his death, quite hasty by local practice. The government has not reported on the results of a post-mortem medical examination, except to claim that Solehov had been drinking at the time of his death.

WHO WAS MAHMADNAZAR SOLEHOV?

18. (C) Like President Rahmon, The 52-year old Solehov was from a Kulyabi family, and held several high-level government jobs throughout his life. Before serving as Interior Minister, Solehov was the Chief of the President's administration from 2003 to 2006. He was also Chairman of the Council of Judges from January to December 2003 and Chairman of the Constitutional Court from 2000 to 2003. During the civil war he was a prosecutor in Sughd Oblast. Like other prosecutors, he likely used his position for personal gain. During his tenure as Chief of the Presidential Administration, he allegedly sold government positions to supplement his personal income. This is not untypical behavior here.

19. (S) Rumors purporting to explain Solehov's fall from grace are making the rounds. There is simply no way to confirm any of these stories, and indeed many of them are likely false, but their prevalence gives some indication of the fertile atmosphere surrounding these events. In early February embassy staff heard from multiple sources that Russian police had arrested Solehov's son, along with the sons of the Minister of Energy and the head of the Organized Crime Unit, for attempting to smuggle heroin into Moscow. According to one version, one of the sons tried to buy his way out of captivity by offering Russian authorities a

\$1 million bribe. This rumor never made it into the newspapers.

According to another rumor, also unprinted, Solehov had told a close circle of friends shortly before his arrest that it was time to see the President go. One of the friends, however, turned out to be an informant for the State Security Committee, who informed the President's staff. A similar rumor but from another perspective has it that Solehov was in contact with Uzbek secret services, and aimed to somehow overthrow Rahmon.

¶10. (C) Comment: It is not unusual for senior officials to leave government service only to be later charged with various crimes; the system here is deeply corrupt, so there is no shortage of compromising material, and the threat of arrest and prison is a convenient tool to maintain the loyalty of former officials. It is, however, quite unusual for a senior official to end up dead under such suspicious circumstances. The questions surrounding Solehov's death, including the speed of his burial, lend some credence to suspicions that he was murdered, presumably for some act of disloyalty to Rahmon. But there is no way to be confident about this conclusion. Whatever the true story, this incident serves as a reminder that Tajikistan, and especially its ruling elite, may be less stable than it seems. End comment.
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